A Boy's Religion from Memory

By Rufus M. Jones, M.A.

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RELIGION . . .

FROM MEMORY.

BY RUFUS M. JONES, M.A., D.LITT.

"I have not so far left the coasts of life
To travel inland, that I cannot hear
That murmur of the outer Infinite
Which unweaned babes smile at in their sleep
When wondered at for smiling."

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING
in *Aurora Leigh*.

LONDON:
HEADLEY BROTHERS,
14, BISHOPSGATE STREET
WITHOUT, E.C. 1903.

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INTRODUCTION.

IT is not a pleasant task to write or speak in the first person, and the privilege of writing autobiography is properly reserved to old age. The pages which make up this modest little book have been written with no thought of throwing light upon the personality of the writer, and the simple story is told here for a totally different end than to awaken an interest in his own somewhat uneventful boyhood. The purpose in short is to tell what a boy's religion is like, to show it growing and developing. We have books enough which attempt the difficult task of conceiving the religion of primitive man. We are beginning, too, to get some literature on the child's religion, though at the present time the amount is meagre and the positive results of the study of the

child rather scanty. It may be worth while for a man, who is still in sight of his childhood, to try to tell how it felt to be a boy, and particularly to endeavour to bring back the deeper side of those days when the soul was not too scarred and callous to feel the spiritual world which impinges on the one we see with our eyes.

The difficulty of course is to draw the true line here between memory and imagination. If one could really succeed in producing the inner side of his boyhood, the contribution would be extremely valuable. But the moment a mature person undertakes to give a memory of the religion of his boyhood he strains it through the entire afterlife and so colours it all with the tinge which later experience has added. Then, with the most honest of us imagination will cheat us into believing that we *remember* what we only fancy, or think we ought to have felt. This difficulty is verily insurmountable and must frankly be confessed. The present writer has simply done his best to tell things as they were —though he makes no claim to infallibility—

and he has stubbornly refused to beautify his picture with the aid of doubtful material, which was all the time more abundant than the genuine.

The real object for writing at all has been to impress the fact that a boy, caught wild in the country, with all the impulses of evil from within playing upon him, and manifold temptations crowding upon him from without, is yet more concerned over his spiritual condition than he is over anything else. In a word, the average boy is profoundly religious, as these pages will indicate. He may easily be turned against religion by unwise treatment, but if the atmosphere about him is right, he will come into a religious life as naturally as he comes into the other great inheritances of the race.

These chapters will, however, be in vain if they fail to indicate how difficult is the task of discovering what goes on within the boy, or if they fail to show what delicate treatment is required to bring him through his budding periods and his shifting ideals to a clear and well-defined life purpose. If boys are better

than they seem to be, as this book maintains, they are also much more difficult to understand than is generally believed, and their lives are in more unstable equilibrium. The parents' responsibility is most assuredly a solemn one, for in the days of boyhood the invisible structure of a self is silently being woven, and the social environment is a tremendous factor in the final product. Here is the modest effort to tell how one boy's life formed itself and what the environment was.

The secondary purpose of the writer has been to preserve a little longer the memory of a form of religious life and a set of customs which one must somewhat sadly confess are either passing away or have already passed away. Quakerism is still a living force. It is a present faith and it has a great potential future. But the Quakerism which was the atmosphere of this boy's life has in large measure already ceased from the earth. It was a unique type of religious life and it kept its peculiar form only so long as it existed apart from the currents of the larger social whole. The movements of modern complex life have forced it either to die

out or undergo transformation. It was a beautiful faith and it produced rare types of personal sainthood whose story is not yet written. In this simple way some impressions of that spiritual atmosphere, with its local colour, are caught and preserved. It is only a thumb nail sketch of a subject large enough for a worthier canvas.

RUFUS M. JONES.

CHAPTER I.

Earliest Memories.

IT is always worth while to see how a boy thinks. The trouble is that very few boys let out their deepest thoughts and musings, and when they get old enough to tell their "long, long thoughts," they have become too old to remember them! Their boyhood ideas get all mixed up and confused with the maturer thoughts and conceptions of the grown man and the boy's inner world never gets quite revealed. I hope I have not yet "travelled so far inland" that I have entirely forgotten the heaven that lay "about me in my infancy," and I shall try to gather up some of the fragments of that happy period when my life was just beginning to feel the tides of the boundless sea, breaking on the shores of its tiny island.

We never remember anything about the most important years of our lives—those first three when we are really getting under way, when we learn to eat, and to see, to walk and to talk, when we discover that *we are* and that other people *are*, when we come upon the mighty fact that we have a will and that we must obey something not ourselves, but higher than we.

Those three years will not come back. They are like the water which the mill has used, and which has gone on, never to flow back upon itself. Others may tell us little snatches out of this lost strip of ourselves, and we may have heard things told until we half believe that we remember, but few of us are sound authorities on the wisdom of those submerged years. But this much I know. I came into a world where love was waiting for me, and into a family in which religion was as important an element for life as was the air we breathed.

There were, however, some features which would naturally discourage a newcomer. It was a good many miles from any city, the house to which I came was most plainly

furnished, a cold bleak winter was at its height, and if I had seen the whole situation in these first hours I should certainly have begun life with " the blues." But those " creaturely " things troubled me not a bit. It never occurred to me that this was a world of inequalities, and I had no dream of the struggle by which one wins what he gets.

The only real fact I can relate about these first hours is one which shows what the highest ambition of the family was, and it will also illustrate a characteristic trait in the person who did very much to shape my life in those years when I was plastic to the touch. As soon as I came into the arms of my aunt, who was and is one of God's saints, she had an " opening " such as have often come to her. " This child will one day bear the message of the Gospel to distant lands and to people across the sea." It was spoken solemnly and with a calm assurance as though she saw the little thing suddenly rising out of her lap to go.

That prophecy may seem like a simple word, but it expressed the highest ideal of that heart, and it was never given

up, even when the growing child showed signs of doing anything else rather than fulfilling the prediction. If the neighbours, in the period of stormy boyhood, had been told of the prophecy they would for once have lost their faith in the forevision of this woman whom they all loved and generally believed.

As I have said, while I was too young to have any religion of my own, I had come to a home where religion kept its fires always burning. I was not "christened" in a church, but I was sprinkled from morning till night with the dew of religion. We never ate a meal which did not begin with a hush of thanksgiving; we never began a day without "a family gathering," at which mother read a chapter of the Bible, and after a long silence some one would generally bow and talk with God so simply and quietly that He never seemed very far away. In fact, when I first began to think of God I did not think of Him as very far off. At meeting some of the Friends shouted loud and strong when they called upon Him, but at home He always heard easily.

The next story I remember out of this dim period of my youth shows how religion filtered into my play. Our house was one of the headquarters of travelling Friends, of whom I shall have more to say later, and my father used to drive through the community and "appoint meetings" for them. I was always hearing about "'pointed meetings," whatever they might be. So when the little tots came to play with me, I worked out my budding Quakerism on them. I gathered them in a row on the floor and told them to sit still for we were going to have a 'pointed meeting. Then I stood up in front and *pointed* with great solemnity to each one of them.

One of the very earliest memories out of this dim period is the return of my aunt—the one of the prophecy—from an extensive religious visit through Ohio and Iowa Yearly Meetings. I was most impressed, of course, with the things she brought me. They were as wonderful to me as the dusky-skinned natives, which Columbus carried back, were to the people who crowded about his returning ship. Iowa was farther off then than the Philippines are now.

But the next impression was made by the marvellous stories of special providences and strange leadings which had been experienced in the journey. I listened as though one of the Argonauts were telling of their adventures in search of the golden fleece. Every place where there was a Meeting-house had its peculiar episode, which I had told over and over to me.

This was the first thing which made me realise that the world was so big. Before that it seemed to me that it came to an end where the sky touched the hills. But now my aunt had been out beyond the place where the sky came down, and she had found the earth still going on out there!

But, after all, the most wonderful thing was the way in which God took care of her and told her what to do and to say in every place where she went. It seemed to be exactly like the things they read to me out of the life of Joseph and Moses and David, and I supposed that everybody who was good had such things done for them. I made up my mind to be good and have things done for *me!*

But I got a sad awakening which disturbed me, and made me discover a fact which puzzles old heads sometimes—the fact that the righteous sometimes *suffer*. One night the Baptist church—the only church building in our little village—burned to the ground. The neighbours improvised an investigation committee, for they suspected it was set on fire, and they soon found that it was part of a deep-laid scheme of revenge.

In our village one man sold liquor, though it was against the law of our State. He was a very hard and dangerous man to deal with. But a temperance meeting had been held in this church which stirred the community to action, and my father had much to do with bringing this liquor-seller to justice. He paid his fine and then went to work to punish those who had disturbed him. He hired a poor man to burn the church, and he planned next to burn our house. It was a small matter, as the house did not get burned, but I was old enough to get a shock from the event. It seemed then that it was somewhat risky to be good! You might get your house burned if you

tried to make bad men stop being wicked. And yet God did after all take care of us, and only a Baptist Church got burned! Out of it all I got some little glimpse into the nature of the world, and though I could not yet solve the problem of evil, I began to think about it.

CHAPTER II.

Thoughts and Superstitions.

I CANNOT remember when I did not think about God and wonder about Him. It was very hard, however, to make things go together in my thoughts about Him. I knew that He really lived in a beautiful city up above the blue dome of the sky, which always appeared to be exactly over the top of our house—the highest place in the sky was surely there. But, then, too, He was everywhere else. He made the flowers grow. He brought me a little brother when I was four years old. He was near enough to hear people talk to Him. He could see every bad thing I did. When we had "silence" after morning "reading" I always thought He was somewhere near telling mother or my aunt what to pray for, and then hearing them

when they spoke. They often asked Him to make me a good boy, and I believed that He was always looking after me.

I was dreadfully afraid of the dark through my entire boyhood. I always thought the dark was "inhabited." I did not feel quite sure whether the inhabitants were good or bad, whether they were kind or unfriendly. But I thought it best not to take any chances. There was a dark place in our cellar into which I never went. It was pitiably near the apple bin, and I had a feeling that "something" might come out upon me any time. I had the same feeling about another place in an old attic, and I still dream about it. I never went down cellar without talking in a loud, strong voice, and I never came up without feeling that I had had an "escape." I used to look round from the top of the stairs to see if any "face" was looking up at me. Nobody ever told me that there were "beings" in the dark, but it was a deep-seated conviction.

Now I thought God lived in the light, just as these "beings" lived in the dark. Good things always came in the daylight. I had

to go to bed as soon as it grew dark, and I had a feeling that almost anything might happen before morning came. I always used to whisper after I got in bed, "Oh, God, please do not let the house burn down to-night. Do not let anybody *get* me, and do not let any bad things happen." But I never felt as sure of the result as I did when I asked Him to do things for me in the daytime.

All this time I found it difficult to understand how God could be up there in His beautiful city and still down here too, looking after so many things—taking care of a little boy like me. It seemed as though He must have a host of troubles. We always told Him all about ours, and I supposed everybody else did the same, which I felt would make His days full of trying things. I thought, too, that He had to decide on the kind of punishment for every person who was bad. *That* seemed like a very heavy task—because mother had a good deal of trouble doing it for three of us. It was thus a never-ending puzzle how He could be in so many places at once, and how He could be happy when He had so many hard things to do.

I began to go to school when I was four years old. We had half a mile to walk, and so we took our dinner in a pail and ate it in the school house. I learned something in the school, but I learned a good deal more at noon and before school; only it was a very different kind of thing I learned outside! This is not the place to describe a country school as it used to be and probably still is. It is a wonder how any boy can come through such influences without being injured for life. The boys and girls I played with were probably just like others—but they knew a lot of things I never heard about at home! I learned these lessons very fast, and by the time I could read I had the small country boy's stock of information, and I had a new side of life altogether.

I said "thee" and "thy" to everybody, and I would fully as soon have used profane words as have said "you" or "yours" to any person. I thought only "Friends" went to heaven, and so I supposed that the use of "thee" and "thy" was one of the main things which determined whether one would be let in or not. Nobody ever told me anything like

this, and if I had asked anybody at home about it, I should have had my views corrected. But for a number of years this was my settled faith.

I pitied the poor neighbours who would never be let in, and I wondered why everybody did not "join the meeting" and learn to say "thee" and "thy." I had one little Gentile friend whom I could not bear to have "lost," and I went faithfully to work and taught him "the language," which he always used with me until he was ten or twelve years old, when the strain of the world got too heavy upon the little fellow! I am quite sure no Israelite in the days of Israel's prosperity ever had a more certain conviction that he belonged to a peculiar people whom the Lord had chosen as His own than I did. There was for me an absolute break between "us" and anybody else. This pharisee-ism was never taught me nor encouraged directly by anybody, but I none the less had it. If I had anything in the world to glory over it was that I was a Quaker.

Others about me had a good deal more that was tangible than I had. Their

life was easier and they did not have as hard a struggle to get things which they wanted as we did. But they were not "chosen" and we were! As far back as I can travel in my memory I find this sense of superiority—a sort of birthright into divine grace and favour. I think it came partly from impressions I got from travelling Friends, whose visits had an indescribable influence upon me, as I shall show later.

It will, of course, seem to have been a very narrow view, and so it was, but its influence was decidedly important upon me. It gave somewhat of a dignity to my little life to feel that I belonged to God's own people, that out of all the world *we* had been selected to be His, and that His wonders had been worked for *us*, and that we were objects of His special love and care.

Everybody at home, as well as many of our visitors, believed implicitly in immediate divine guidance. Those who went out from our meeting to do extended religious service —and there were many such visits undertaken—always seemed as directly selected for these momentous missions as were the

prophets of an earlier time. As far back as I can remember I can see Friends sitting talking with my grandmother of some "concern" which was heavy upon them, and the whole matter seemed as important as though they had been called by an earthly king to carry on the affairs of an empire. It was partly these cases of divine selection and the constant impression that God was using these persons whom I knew to be His messengers that made me so sure of the fact that we were His chosen people. At any rate I grew up with this idea firmly fixed, and the events which will next be told deepened the feeling.

CHAPTER III.

An Accident, and its Results.

I BEGAN to go to Bible School when I was six years old. It was a union school, held on the top floor of a store in a room which had been fitted up as a public hall. I was in a class of little boys, and we were taught by a Friend who knew more about farming than he did about boys, and who sometimes made us laugh with his funny way of talking; but he did us a real service, and I still remember some of the passages in the Psalms which he had us learn "by heart."

Learning by heart had not then gone out of fashion, and in our neighbourhood the idea was cherished that a well-stored memory might possibly some day prove useful. This was, it will be understood, before the discovery of the method of entertaining children with pretty stories to

make the hour interesting. We sat on a hard straight bench, with our little feet some way from the floor, and said over and over our verses which we had learned during the week. "Whither shall I fly from Thy pres-sence?" was one of the passages; and then our teacher "moralised" to us until the hour was up.

But my real acquaintance with the Bible was made at that best school—a mother's knee. The Bible was our one Book at home, and we used it as the scholar uses his library. We literally fed ourselves on it. We began the day with reading it. We read out of it in the evening, and we read it on First-day as part of the business of the day.

When I was eight years old I was set to read the Psalms through, with the promise of a new pair of mittens—as strangely coloured as Joseph's coat—when the task was done. I faithfully did it, and what is more, it did me good. I really felt the power of this Hebrew poetry, and I soon got to know the Psalms so that at morning reading I used to call for my favourite ones when mother asked if any one had a "selection."

Two years later—when I was ten—came one of the crises of my life. It was a great misfortune which turned out to be a blessing, as is usually the case, if one has eyes to see it. I had a dreadful injury to my foot, which nearly cost me my leg, and seriously threatened my life. Through all the pain and suffering I discovered what a mother's love was. I had been going to the bad all summer. I was finding out the endless resources for fun and mischief, which a country village, full of boys and girls, offers, and I had stretched the proverbial apron-string to the breaking point.

I had got in the way of doing things which I did not tell at home, and I often hurried away in the morning before I found what the work of the day would be, so that I might have the day on the lake with the boys. Temptations were as thick as bees on the clover, and I let them settle on me without scaring them off. When I came home at night I generally felt hopelessly bad, for I knew I had grieved everybody who loved me; but the next day I did the same thing over again, if I got a chance. This particular misfortune came because I had gone to the lake

early First-day morning for a swim, and so did not get back in time to go to meeting with the family.

For nine months I never took a step, and for the first week of my suffering, mother sat by me every night, and I felt her love sweep over me. As soon as I was through the racking pain, something had to be done to entertain me—to make the long hours pass, for everybody in our household was occupied with their own tasks.

Grandmother, who was eighty-eight years old, had plenty of leisure, and so it was arranged for us to entertain each other. I decided to read the Bible through out loud to her. She could knit mechanically with flying needles, giving no more attention to her fingers than she did to the movement of the hands on the clock. Her hands had learned how to knit until they did it themselves.

Lying stretched out by her, I began at the great words, "In the beginning God created," and read on through the wonderful events. There were many passages which puzzled me and held me up, but

between us we generally thought our way through, and we fixed up an explanation which I dare say might not be found in the latest commentary; but perhaps it was as near right as some of the conclusions there given, for it came from the mouth of the little ones whose wisdom Christ commendeth.

The real trial came when I got into a "begat" chapter, and had to read through generations of men who had unpronounceable names. Here grandmother suddenly found that her knitting needed most of her attention, and I had to do the best I could with Chedorlaomer and other persons whose mothers I thought showed no taste in the choice of names. But I never skipped anything. I fully believed that one line was just as much inspired as another, and I always had fear of those plagues which were spoken of at the end upon those who put in or left out something.

As soon, however, as we got to the main current, which begins with the call of Abraham, I was carried on by the force of the stream. This was the most interesting thing I had ever read, and I finished Joseph with tears running down my face. I shall never get over that impression.

Boys nowadays read so many stories and such highly spiced ones, full of dramatic situations, that they do not perhaps feel the power of this wonderful picture of the patriarchal life. It is a sad loss to miss it. It more than made up for my lack of other books —and for me these characters were as real and vivid as the people moving in the next room.

Every event of Jacob's and Joseph's careers was as clearly pictured as were the things my eyes had seen. Moses's life and deeds in Egypt, and the events of the exodus and wilderness journey were hardly less moving ; but I found my passage often impeded in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. There was nothing in my world like it. I could not imagine the descriptions. I got dreadfully frightened over eating pork, because the swine did not chew the cud, and so had " no standing under the law." Not a person in our neighbourhood could explain on what ground we boldly went on eating pork in flat contradiction of the Scriptures ! This gave grandmother and me some very hard exegesis, and we never felt that we made a good case.

As a boy, I thought Judges a great book. I did not realise then, as I do now, what a crisis this period was in Israel's history, when "every man was doing what was right in his own eyes," but I was carried along with intense interest over the doings of Deborah, and Gideon, and Jephtha, and Samson. Here my imagination had no such difficulties as it had encountered over Urim and Thummim, and the ark, which I never could quite reconstruct.

But David was my hero. He was a man after my own heart. I always had a thrill as Samuel passed all Jesse's sons without finding his king-boy, and finally discovered him off with the sheep, and then came the description of the great battle with Goliath in the "Valley of Elah," which came to be the most familiar scene to me of any recorded in the Old Testament. It was the glory of being God's champion which moved me so, and the fact that a boy from the sheepfold could deliver a nation kindled me. Wherever the narrative grew vivid and great events were done I felt my pulses throb, and, on the other hand, I always suffered over Israel's defeats and sins.

Daniel and Esther were two of my best books, and I knew intimately all the details of their experiences. The prophets, however, were far above me. Elijah and Elisha were all right, but the ones who *wrote* did not speak to my condition. I knew it must all be wonderful, and I believed that they were speaking for God, but I did not understand what they meant. It was all a puzzle which nobody could solve for me, and it was only much later, when I knew the history which called forth these messages, that I learned to love and appreciate them.

Before I began the New Testament I was well enough to go out, so that my reading stopped, and it was not until much later that I got deeply hold of that message which came from the Master.

The Old Testament was the book of my boyhood. My heroes and heroines were there. It gave me my first poetry, and my first history, and I got my growing ideas of God from it. The idea of choice, the fact that God chose a people and that He chose individuals for His missions was rooted in my thought.

It was during this year that a large company of the neighbours met at our house to study the Bible one evening in the week, and I offered to let them question me as long as they wished on any events of the Old Testament, and I did not fail. It was a boyish confidence which I should not show now, but it will make clear that this Book had been made my own.

CHAPTER IV.

Visits of Ministering Friends.

NOBODY ever quite realises how his life is being woven day by day out of a myriad of invisible threads. But, in fact, each unnoticed influence and every imperceptible tug up or down which the ordinary daily experience furnishes are silently *making* the life and shaping its course. The commonplace present we hardly count because we are always looking back on a past, or dreaming ahead into a rosy future, which will be full of wonderful and epoch-making events. And yet all the time, spite of us, the future is being made out of the present, and the stuff of our future is to be what we are now weaving in. We have only to look back to see how true this is.

We never really cut loose from our old selves; the threads which the boy wove in are still in the structure when manhood finds him. The tastes we formed, the habits we acquired, the ambitions we fed, the beliefs we grew up in, are still a part of us. All this makes childhood and youth momentously important and critical periods. The river may become a Mississippi and water half a continent, but its whole course will be determined by the tip of the current up at its source.

Among the many influences which went to form and determine my early life—and so in a measure my whole life—I should give a large place to the visits of ministering Friends who came to us. No such system of interchange has been practised among any other religious people as that which used to be familiar among Friends. My great-uncle drove in his carriage from Maine to Indiana at least twice on religious visits, visiting families and attending meetings as he went, and living much of the time on the way *in his carriage.* It was a very common and ordinary matter for New England Friends to drive to the "Provinces" on religious visits, and as soon as the

railroads made travel easy the small meetings even in remote corners had opportunities to see and hear Friends from every part of the country, and often from over seas.

They were frequently strangely unlike our native, home-born folks, with odd-looking clothes and unusual accents of speech. Some possessed marked culture and refinement, and some were hardly able to construct a sentence which did not violate the ordinary rules of Gould Brown's Grammar. They all came from a world as unknown to me as was the African jungle, and they were curiosities of a very high order to be gazed at and listened to.

It is not easy to explain why a person who comes from a place a thousand miles away should impress one so much more than an equally good person whom one meets every day, but the fact remains. Familiarity does play havoc with us all. The prophet always dwells somewhere else than where we have settled. He is always in another town, in another State—never one of the well-known figures of our own neighbourhood. These men and women who seemed so wonderful

to me were often very ordinary persons at home. Their neighbours had no idea that they were lights of the first magnitude, but when they came into our horizon like a new star, with no known history to judge them by, I always believed them to be remarkable persons, and very often they *were* such.

Then, too, I felt a certain awe because they always came with "a concern," which means that they had left their homes and had undertaken the long journey because they had received an unmistakable and irresistible call to go out and speak what was given them.

This was no ordinary visit. Here was a man under our roof who had come because God sent him. I supposed that he had something inside which had told him to go and where to go, and that this "something inside" told him exactly what to say when he spoke to us. In my childish thought I put these "beloved brothers with minutes" in a very high class, with an inspiration only a little below that which the writers of the Bible possessed. The reason that I took this view was partly due to the fact that so many of them "spoke to the state and condition" of some one either in

our family or in the neighbourhood. These visiting ministers had a way of seeing through your life, and of prophesying your future, which made one solemn when they spoke.

While a company of neighbours was gathered in our sitting-room, a Friend of this authoritative sort had been sitting in silence, when he quietly rose and asked a man in the room to stand up. He then asked a woman who was present to stand by the side of the man. With deep reverence and solemnity, he said: "I think that will do, and I believe it has the divine approval." Not long after, this couple, thus encouraged, were joined in marriage, and entered upon a union which was much blessed. Nobody thought of this in a light way. It was taken as an undoubted expression of the will of God.

Not far from us a visiting Friend of great weight and power was holding a meeting by appointment. A large company came to hear him because he had a remarkable gift. One man in the community, who had the reputation of being a sceptic, had not gone. This man got on horseback and started for the village by a

road which passed the one that led into the meeting-house. As he rode along he felt irresistibly impressed that he ought to go to meeting, but he would not give in. As he came near the junction of the roads he threw the reins on the horse's neck and resolved to go whichever way the horse took him. Contrary to his well-formed habit, the horse turned in to the meeting-house, and the man went into the meeting. The house was full, and the minister was preaching a powerful sermon. The man dropped into a seat by the door as much unnoticed as possible. Suddenly the minister stopped, fixed his eye, and said, "So thou decided to leave it to thy horse. It would have been well to have left it to the horse years ago." Then he preached a direct and searching sermon, which reached this man's life and changed the whole current of his thought.

These were no rare and isolated incidents. Such things were frequent. One Friend in particular who used to come from a distant Yearly Meeting was strikingly gifted to see into the hidden secrets of the heart, and I had an unquestioning belief in

her power to read a life. Another Friend—this time from England—had astonished everybody at Monthly Meeting by preaching a sermon which unfolded the condition of a prominent member of the meeting so plainly that it seemed as though God had sent a direct message.

All these things worked upon me and impressed me, and then still further, these far-travelled visitors would sit by our hearth and tell of their remarkable experiences in other places—how the Lord had sent them out with nothing and had provided for them, or how they had been led into strange and unexpected service, or how they had felt out the condition of some family or meeting which they had visited, until I learned to believe that ministers—at least those that came from a distance—were, if not little lower than angels, then surely considerably higher than ordinary mortals. Even now I never see one of these persons who were the prophets of my childhood without adding something to him for memory's sake, and, as I listen, his words mean more to me than they otherwise would, because I colour them

with my childish belief that he must be greater and more gifted than other persons—for had not God sent him to us?

Whenever such visitor as I have been describing came we had an "opportunity," or a "'tunity," as we children named it, when we were too small to pronounce both ends of a long word. The choice of this word indicates a happy insight and shrewd wisdom on the part of those who used the word, for an "opportunity," put in plain, cold language, was nothing more nor less than a religious meeting held in the home by the ministering Friend who was "visiting families."

It never was quite settled in my mind whether it was an "opportunity" for the visitor or for the family, but it always made a sharp and immediate break with whatever we were doing at the time. If we were playing when the word came, the game was left half finished; if we were working the task was interrupted, and we all gathered in the little sitting-room with the visitor, who had come from far with a "concern" for us. Not unfrequently I heard my own name spoken as the minister raised

his voice in prayer, and God was asked by this special servant of His to help *me*. I knew that such a prayer would count, and I always felt more confidence in myself after this kind of an "opportunity" was over. But I half feared, too, that some of these penetrating souls would see how very bad I was, and how impossible it was for me to keep good very long.

One Friend came who went to sleep on our sitting-room sofa, and in her sleep suddenly began to preach. We were all called in, and for more than half an hour she poured forth a remarkable Gospel message, which filled me with awe, and when she woke up she had no knowledge that she had said anything. This greatly increased my faith in the Bible stories which told how God showed things in dreams.

Once a dear, saintly man, who was as graceful and courtly as though he had been a knight of Arthur's Round Table, and whose kindly face has been a benediction to thousands, came to visit us. He brought with him a young man who had run away from the Southern army because he could

not fight, and who had afterwards became a Friend. They were both most unusual men, and I had hardly stirred as I had been listening to their words, which fascinated me and moved me. The saintly man walked over to me and put his hands on my head and slowly announced his prophecy about me. I was then ten years old. What he said would ordinarily have made little impression. But I fully believed that he knew what he was saying, and the words remained with me as an inspiration long after the man himself had forgotten that he spoke them. They have since been fulfilled in every respect.

I am not now concerned with the influence of these itinerant ministers in the public meetings which they attended. That must wait for a later chapter. I am speaking only of the personal influence in the homes which they visited. They told us of life and work in far-off lands. They interested us with their narratives, and in our narrow life they performed somewhat the service of the wandering minstrel in the days of the old castles. They gave us new experiences, a touch of wider life and farther-reaching associations, and

for me at least, they made the connection with God more real. I got from them a clearer sense of what I might be, and it was largely because I believed that men and women had been *sent* from remote lands to visit us that I was so sure that we were a chosen people.

CHAPTER V.

The Old Meeting-House.

NEVER again in this world will any one see such a meeting as the one to which I went twice in the week, after I was old enough to sit upright in a seat. Such a meeting will not be seen again simply because the kind is passing away, and because the characters who composed it were absolutely original and unique—not to be matched anywhere.

The meeting-house was a plain wooden building, with unpainted seats, and divided into two equal halves by wooden "shutters," which could be raised or lowered to make two rooms or one of the house as occasion required. Along the front ran two elevated seats, one above the other—called the "high seats"—where the ministers and

OLD FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE.

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elders sat, facing the body of the house. We lived three miles from the meeting-house, over a rocky, hilly road, running all the way through woods. The question, however, was never raised whether we should or should not go to meeting, any more than it was whether we should or should not have dinner. Even the horse knew that he was foreordained to these bi-weekly trips, and to his long, quiet wait in the meeting-house "shed."

The house was well filled—men on one side and women on the other. All the women past middle life wore the long, stiff, flaring bonnet, covered with grey silk, with a cape behind, which was the mark of good standing in our Quaker community. The elder ones wore underneath a dainty white muslin cap. The men of our meeting had no set dress, though one or two ancient Friends had broad beaver hats and collarless coats, which brought down to our time the garb of sanctity which prevailed a generation before.

There were two rows of "high-seat" Friends on each side, and, though none of them had been to "Oxford or Cambridge," nor, I may add, to any institution more advanced than

a high school, there were some of God's anointed ministers in that little group. The one who sat at " the head " on the men's side and the one who occupied the similar place on the women's side had been to the Holy Land, and, when I began to go to meeting, had recently returned from that land, all fresh with the impressions which their travels had made upon them, and full of living, vivid pictures of the scenes where the great events in the world's spiritual history had come to pass. They both had a marvellous power of interesting, and they fixed attention both by message and manner. The Friend on the men's side spoke more often from the Old Testament, and, in his original, eloquent style, made some one of the characters live and act his part before our eyes. His wife, with a voice of mingled softness and power, and a grace that a queen might have envied, generally made the story of redeeming love her theme, and she loved to follow the steps of the " blessed feet " from the early days in Nazareth until they were pierced on Calvary. She often saw tears glisten in the corners of eyes as she spoke. I was a boy,

and I loved the story of David and his daring deeds, or the dramatic course of Joseph in Egypt, better. I understood it all, and I knew that I would have done the same thing —if I had dared! I used to feel my whole self go out in interest as I followed these descriptions.

They both made sin awfully real, and they left no shadow of doubt of its ultimate effect, but the striking note of their preaching was the beauty and joy and peace which the true life gives. They made religion attractive. They told the story of the cross so that I felt its *power*. In every sermon there would break out some great word about the meaning and possibility of life, until, boy as I was, I wanted to be something and to do something to show that I appreciated such love.

There was also in this "high-seat" group a woman who wore the white flower of a holy life. She had passed through deep trials, and had tasted bitter cups, but she had won her way into the secrets of the Lord. She lacked some qualities which a public speaker needs, but her inward grace and daily converse with

her Lord more than made up the lack. Her ministry was convincing beyond all argument, and her rising or kneeling always left a fragrance which lasted after meeting broke.

On the other side was one who spoke with a foreign accent, who had come among us from a distant land. He, too, had come through hard, trying experiences, but he had come out bloom-furnaced and with a marvellous story of victory. Gifted he was with rare powers of speech, full of striking incidents, apt with illustration and always ready with a poetic passage which fitted his theme. To him I listened as a child to a loved story.

Very often in these meetings, which were held for two hours, there were long periods of silence, for we never had singing. I do not think anybody ever told me what the silence was for. I used to sit and wonder what other people were thinking of. I sometimes tried to see how much I could count before something would happen! But sometimes a real spiritual wave would go over the meeting in these silent times, which made me feel very solemn, and carried me—careless boy though

I was—down into something which was deeper than my own thoughts, and gave me a momentary sense of that Spirit who has been the light of men in all ages and in all lands.

But I have been speaking of our meeting as though it were somewhat ideal—a place where only uplifting and edifying words were heard, and where we were all baptised into the unity of the one Spirit. Alas, the millenium was still a good way off, and the checkerboard condition of life, which we all know so well—with squares of black as well as squares of white—prevailed here also. I doubt if any small company of individuals ever had a larger share of peculiar persons.

The New Englander who has been unspoiled by city influences is almost always "original"—different from everybody else. He is very apt to adopt some pet idea, and rock and feed it until it possesses him. He will have his own quaint way of telling it, but let him start where he may, he is sure to come round to it and give it voice. Once let such a person settle down into an idea and a peculiar way of expressing it, one might almost as well

try to change the path of the zodiac as to get him out of his rut.

Our meeting was richly supplied with characters who travelled round and round their single truth, their mighty discovery, until we knew every turn and twist in their mental windings. No sermon could possibly be preached which did not set off one or more of these tethered souls round the beaten path of his favourite idea. They each felt that the other's idea was wrong, or empty, and that the meeting was not edified by it, and each one of them felt that the coming together was not entirely profitable unless he had unburdened his spirit and rolled his great truth on the meeting. They all had funny ways of speaking and of making gestures—curious expressions appeared from time to time, and the frequent repetition of them only made them sound more odd.

One of these characters wore a strange and remarkable garb, which he believed was required of him, and this added to the quaintness of his speaking, which of itself was queer almost beyond belief. All

this was a hard test on a boy. Imitation is one of the earliest instincts. From the first smile of the baby, the imitative instinct works. It is almost impossible not to imitate odd and curious ways, and we children used to play meeting and act over and over the characteristic things which we heard, until it got ever more difficult to sit through them with sober faces.

The most wonderful thing, however, was the patience and the grace of the weighty members of the meeting in dealing with these situations. They held rigidly to the freedom of speech. The difference between the great gospel message which came from one of the saints of the meeting, and the queer deliverance which often proceeded from the odd prophets of a single idea was something remarkable. But the meeting steadfastly gave the latter his opportunity. It was plainly a trial, but the jarring notes only made it all the more necessary for the spiritual members to do their part to make the tone of the meeting high. Their faith in the power of the truth, their saintly patience and gentleness under difficulties had their

effect upon us all, and we got so that we could pass from the soul-stirring sermon on "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?" to the weird shrill words, "I wonder what difference it makes what *we* think. The question ain't whether or no or not *we* think so; no, not by no means!" and feel almost no shock. Gradually we learned to get the good and to pass the other by.

CHAPTER VI.

Taking the Sense of the Meeting.

"IF Friends' minds are easy, I apprehend it may now be a suitable time to lower the shutters and proceed to the business of the meeting." As the venerable elder at the head of the meeting spoke these words, slowly and solemnly, he raised his broad-brim and put it on his head with considerable dignity, and we children knew that the "first meeting" was over. In these modern days a dinner is served "between the meetings," but in my boyhood days no such thing ever happened. Not even the hungry boy got a bite until the affairs of the Church were properly settled. Creak, creak, creak—we heard the middle "shutters" coming down from above to divide the men from the women. I could never imagine how it was done! No

human instrument was ever anywhere visible. The ancient elder spoke, and lo, the wonder worked! Later, when the investigating age was upon me, I crawled up a ladder into the loft and solved the mystery; but in the early period it seemed as though the same spirit which "moved" the solemn man to put on his hat was also in the descending shutters, which no visible hand touched!

I used always to sit on the "men's side," but I sat close up by the partition, and ever and anon I caught the notes of a woman's voice breaking in upon our "business" with a strong outpouring of prayer or the earnest word of counsel, for the women had less "business" than the men, and hence "religious exercises" filtered all through their "second meeting." It was somewhat so on the men's side, though to a less extent. But even here it was impossible to draw any line between "business" and "religious exercise." A solemn religious tinge coloured everything, even the driest items of business, and I believe the spiritual tide often rose higher in the "second meeting" than in the first—particularly if there was a visiting minister present.

By the "world's" methods, all our business could have been transacted in twenty minutes. We often spent two hours at it, because every affair had to be soaked in a spiritual atmosphere until the dew of religion settled on it!

Above, in the "high seats," sat two men at a table, fastened by hinges to the ministers' rail. This table was swung up and held by a perpendicular stick beneath. On it lay the old record-book, a copy of the "discipline," and papers of all sorts. The "clerk," the main man of the two at the desk, was another one of those marvellous beings who seemed to me to know everything by something unseen working inside him! How could he tell what "Friends" wanted done, and yet he always knew. No votes were cast. Everybody said something different in his own peculiar way. A moment of silence would come and the clerk would rise and say: "It appears that it is the sense of the meeting" to do thus and so. Spontaneously from all parts of the house would come from variously-pitched voices: "I unite with that." "So do I." "That is my mind." "I should be easy to have it so." And so we passed to the

next subject. Occasionally there would be a Friend who had a "stop in his mind," or who "didn't feel easy" to have things go as the rest believed they should go. If he was a "weighty Friend," whose judgment had been proved through a long past, his "stop" would effectually settle the matter; but if he was a persistent and somewhat cantankerous objector, the clerk would quietly announce that the "weight of the meeting" seemed decidedly favourable to action.

The longest stretch of business was always over the "queries." These were original inventions of the Quaker, and they have no parallel in any other religious body. Like many other things, the "queries," with their carefully-rendered answers, now take a less important place, and the boy of to-day may not tell of them when he gives his impression to the next generation. But in my day they were still alive, and the meeting took them seriously enough. "Are all meetings regularly held?" "Are Friends careful to observe the hour?" "Do Friends keep from all unbecoming behaviour therein?" "Are love and unity maintained?" "Are tale-

bearing and detraction guarded against?" "Do Friends pay their bills, settle their accounts, and live within the bounds of their circumstances?" "Do they read the Holy Scriptures in their families and bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?" "If differences arise, are measures taken to end them speedily?" "Is the discipline administered timely and impartially?" Each separate meeting sent its special set of answers for this public confessional. "Love and unity are not so well maintained as we could wish." "Some Friends do not observe the hour." "Mostly kept from unbecoming behaviour, though a few cases of sleeping in meeting have been observed." "Friends *generally* bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." I had no idea what that meant, though I supposed it meant "to be good."

After the answers were read, we listened to grave preachments on these various lines which "were queried after," as the phrase used to run. What got said on these occasions was not very juicy food for a boy, though the standard of life which was set up in these

times of examination did, after all, have a silent influence which left a good deposit behind.

There were two transactions which were always exciting, and I used each time to live in hope that they would come off. One was "the declaration of intentions of marriage." When such an event occurred the man and woman came in and sat down together, facing the meeting in the completest possible hush. It was an ordeal which made the couple hesitate to rush into marriage until they felt pretty sure that the match was made in heaven. Solemnly they rose, with the parents standing on either side, and informed us that they purposed taking each other in marriage, and the parents announced their consent. The meeting "united" and permission was given "to proceed." The marriage itself came off at an even more solemn meeting, when the man and woman took each other "until death should separate." I remember one of these occasions, when the frightened groom took the bride "to be his husband," which made the meeting less solemn than usual.

The other interesting event was the liberation of ministers for religious service "in other parts." If the minister was a woman Friend, as often happened in our meeting, she came in from the other side with "a companion." They walked up the aisle, sat down with bowed heads. Slowly the bonnet-strings were untied, the bonnet handed to the companion, and the ministering woman rose to say that for a long time the Lord had been calling her to a service in a distant yearly meeting; that she had put it off, not feeling that she could undertake so important a work, but that her mind could not get any peace, and now she had come to ask her Friends to release her for this service. One after another the Friends would "concur in this concern," and the blessing of the Lord would be invoked upon the messenger who was going forth. Some of these occasions were of a heavenly sort, and the voices of strong men choked in tears as a beloved brother or sister was equipped and set free. From this little meeting heralds went out to almost every part of the world, and the act of liberation was something never to be forgotten—only to be surpassed

by the deep rejoicing which stirred the same company when the journey was over and "the minutes were returned."

It is all very well now to sit down at a comfortable desk and write of what happened in these long business meetings. But the kind reader will please remember that the uncushioned seats were hard in those days, and that a boy's stomach will not be fed with "considerations on the state of the Church"! Long before the "concluding minute" was read a rebellion was well under way within. The vivid picture of that steaming dinner which was (to the boy) the real event of these days, blotted out the importance of preserving love and unity, or any other of the desirable things which concerned the elders. At length the happy moment came—"we now separate, proposing to meet again at the usual time and place, if the Lord permit." With this began the invasion of the homes in the neighbourhood. Every dining room had its long table, and an elastic supply to fit the rather reckless invitations which all members of the family gave with little or no consultation. Here was one place where a boy counted as

much as a man! In the meeting he had no part to play—he was not considered—but the havoc he wrought on the dinner made him a person of some importance! If he got crowded out to a second table, the delay only made him a more dangerous element to reckon with! No boy who has had the fortune of being taken to Monthly or Quarterly Meeting in the good old days of positive religion and genuine hospitality will forget what it meant, so long as he remembers anything.

CHAPTER VII.

A Mother's Love.

GOD was just as real a being to me all through my early boyhood as was any one of the persons in our nearest neighbour's house. At home He was talked with every morning, and spoken of all day in a variety of ways. If any sort of a crisis was near us His help was asked, in as simple and confident a way as we asked a neighbour's help when we needed it.

Once when a great danger threatened all day to fall upon our family we quietly met in the living room and sat down together and asked God to deliver us from our trouble. Then mother took the Bible and allowed it to open of itself to a chapter which was meant for us. It opened to the ninety-first Psalm, and I can still remember the thrill

which went over me, and the confidence which rose up in me as she read: "There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." No one of us for a moment doubted these words. They came as though they had been spoken directly to us from the sky, and they proved true. A hundred things which occurred convinced me that God was a real person who took care of us, who knew all about us and who was all the time near by. Again and again I was told to do some particular thing because "God wanted me to do it," or not to do something because "God would not like to have me do it." "How does thee think God will feel?" were the words which met me when I had gone wrong.

Now this overwhelming conviction that I was more closely and immediately under God's care and observation than I was under the eye of the teacher in the little school-room where almost no act escaped notice, would have been very comforting if I had always been good. I really did enjoy thinking, when I had in a rare moment done a good thing, that God was seeing it and liking me for it. But,

alas, the balance was always on the wrong side! I meant to be good. I knew I ought to be. Almost from babyhood I had been told that God wanted to use me in His service, but spite of everything I was for ever finding myself in the wrong path. The happy period of innocence—the brief lease of the garden of Eden which every child all unconsciously has—was soon over for me. The first mouthful of the apple off the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is back of the period of memory, but as far back as I can go I find my Eden very badly lost. No day in that little life of mine was without its pangs, and many of them gave me a real terror. My whole upbringing had given me a quick, sensitive and tender heart, a most exalted idea of duty, a keen vision of the good life, and, as I have said, a certainty that God was entering all my acts and doings in His great books. In my good moments no boy ever was better, and the casual visitor put me down as a model boy—perhaps as almost too good to grow up. But in reality I was a typical sinner. I did precisely the things I knew I ought not to. I can plainly remember walking straight ahead

in a sinful course with every string of my conscience tugging at my heart to pull me back. As soon as I got with "the other boys," I let the din of their suggestions of attractive things drown out the low whispers of the tender heart, and we did the things which boys usually do. It went all right while the excitement lasted, and, at a pinch, I easily became the leader in some desperate undertaking, but on the way home alone I became uncomfortable and low-spirited. It was not so much that I disliked the sure questioning which would come, and that I should find difficulty in showing that my day had been spent in an edifying way, but it was rather a deep, dull feeling that I had gone back on my true self and that I had broken faith with the One Person who knew me altogether.

One particular sin—at least I felt it a sin—dogged me for years. I do not remember when I began it or when I first realised that the thing was wrong, but I learned at a very early period what a mighty undertaking it is to fight down a sin. I hated it, and still I did it. Almost every time I read the Bible I opened to some passage which just hit my

case. I felt sure the passage was meant for me, and in my fear I would resolve to be good all the rest of my days. But any slight, easy temptation would break every fence I had so painfully builded, and I would find myself off again in the enemy's pasture.

My outside life was just like that of any healthy, growing boy. I played boy's games, learned to swim and dive, sail and fish, hunt and skate, and in the times between I went to school and worked on the farm. It looked from the outside as though this made up the whole of my life. But looked at from within my life was mostly an invisible battle. More real than the snow fort which we stormed amid a flight of snowballs until we dislodged the possessors of it, was this unseen stronghold of an enemy who was dislodged, only to come back into his fort stronger than ever, so that my assaults seemed fruitless and vain. All the time those looking on saw only a careless boy, drifting into the ways of the reckless, thoughtless crowd of village boys who seemed to have no conscience, no fear of God or man. How little one knows what goes on deep within the heart, or how sensitive the soul

may be when the acts indicate only a hardened nature! At no period of life have I more earnestly longed to be good than in the dark days of growing self-will when I seemed the worst. What a problem, to deal with a boy so as to reach this deeper, truer self which seems lost, and help him to find himself and something better than himself.

The turning-point, though by no means the attainment, came for me in a very simple incident—of blessed memory. I had gone a step farther than usual, and had done something which grieved everybody at home, and I expected a severe punishment which was administered with extreme infrequency in our home. To my surprise my mother took me by the hand and led me to my room; then she solemnly kneeled down by me and offered a prayer which reached the very inmost soul of me, and reached also the real Helper. No holy of holies could ever have seemed to the pious Jew more awful with the presence of God than that chamber seemed to me. It was one thing to hear prayer in the meeting-house, or in the assembled family, but quite another thing to hear my own case

laid before God in words which made me see just what I was, and no less clearly what I ought to be, and what with His help I might be. I learned that day what a mother was for! And though I was still far from won, I was at least where I could more distinctly feel the thread, between my soul and the Father's, quiver and draw me.

CHAPTER VIII.

Time of Decision.

I HESITATE to speak of such sacred things as inward experiences, but it is manifestly impossible to touch the heart of one's religion, even in boyhood, without a few words of personal confession. They shall be as simple, direct and honest as I can make them. From the nature of the case the events of one's inward life are too private and personal to be really "described"; the most that one can do is to hint at what has gone on within, and to give some "signs" which others may interpret as best they can from their own experience.

I have already told how, little by little, I found myself living a divided life. I was utterly dissatisfied with myself, and yet I did not know what had happened. Somehow I

had passed a boundary. I was no longer a careless, happy-go-lucky boy, satisfied if only I had enough to eat and could play as many hours as I wanted to. There was a flaming sword at every path which led back to the old Eden of peaceful, innocent, happy childhood. Nobody understood me any more, but the worst of it was that I did not in the very least understand myself. I gave up all hope of growing good. It was no use trying. I simply could not succeed. The harder I tried, the more I knew I was failing. My conscience was as sensitive as a compass needle; it felt every deviation and recorded every sin, but there was no great ground swell within which kept me moving towards righteousness. I was in very truth a double personality, for I hated sin. I loved goodness. I knew how awful it was to waste my life, and yet I went to bed night after night with the heavy feeling upon me that I was farther than ever from any goodness and frightened at my day's list of failures. I never talked with anyone about my troubles, and I do not believe those nearest me realised that I was having a crisis, for there was no outward sign of it. This whole

situation—now so hard to describe clearly—would hardly be worth telling about, and would certainly not here come to light, if it were not for the fact that it is an experience which is well nigh universal, and one which needs more attention than it usually gets.

There is in one's early life a whole series of budding periods when some new hunger or desire suddenly sprouts out into a strange activity. Some new capacity dawns and demands a career for itself. The impulse to suck is of course the earliest. The desire to kick the little legs and crow almost overmasters a healthy baby. Without any forewarning, the budding moment comes for creeping, and this most primitive mode of travel has its triumphant course. It would apparently last for life did not a new impulse bud which introduces a better kind of locomotion. There is now an indescribable stirring in the legs, which is the sign that the hour has come to teach walking. More miraculous still is the hatching out of the first word which gives voice to the little soul within. This is a veritable crisis, and it is little use to try to teach speaking until this budding moment has

come, when the tiny spirit asserts his right to be heard.

But now there comes much later a still more critical budding period. The small individual self begins to discover his incompleteness and to yearn, however vaguely, for that life in which he can find fulfilment. His real hunger for God has dawned, and he makes at the same time the painful discovery of his own littleness. He knows as little as when he had the blind desire to suck just what it is he wants. He suffers without knowing what his trouble is. The more passionate his longing for the Infinite Companionship is, the more keen is the conviction of weakness and sin, which settles upon him until he believes he is *lost*, just as that nameless sadness on the face of a teething child gives the impression that he believes the universe is against him.

Now the reason that this particular budding crisis, when the spiritual life is dawning, is so much more serious than the previous ones, is that we know so little how to deal with it, and if it is not dealt with in the right way the whole life will be dwarfed or twisted out of its proper course. We can show the child how

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to walk, but we bungle when we come to the problem of helping a soul to make his adjustment with the Infinite. Then, too, what succeeds gloriously with one such person proves just the wrong method of approach with another. While I was in this crisis—with an old self not dead and a new self not born, and ignorant of what these sunrise streaks on my chaos really meant—we had a new kind of meeting in our little community. It was in the old school-house, and because too many came for the seats to hold, we put boards across and filled the aisles and then brought benches and filled the open space in front, where boys in school-time frequently stood as penalty for small offences. The minister came from a distant town, and bore the distinction of having "elder" before his name. He was a plain, simple, straightforward, good man, who knew a few clear truths of Christianity and he told them impressively.

At first we boys, who filled a large corner, went for fun, and because we liked to sing the new hymns which he introduced—the Sankey hymns, which were then all fresh from the writer's pen, and "singing in meeting" was

a most wonderful innovation. It, however, soon ceased to be " fun " and grew most serious, for I saw that I was approaching an unescapable decision. Each night it became clearer that there were only two kind of lives—with two distinct issues. What had been dim and vague in my long struggle, had suddenly become sharp and clearly defined. I was a poor, sick soul, unable to cure myself, and here the remedy was described. I was drifting hopelessly down the stream. Now I heard what lay at the end of such a course. I knew I wanted something which I always just missed, now I heard how a life gets completed and saved.

But here I was a boy among a great group of boys who had followed my lead in a hundred boyish pranks. I could not take a step without breaking a thousand threads which wove my life into the past and bound me up with this society of my fellows. There were days of this seething struggle, during which I felt that my entire future was at stake. At length one night there came a bursting point, and I rose with every artery in me throbbing and my heart pounding so hard that I thought

everybody must hear it. With a tremendous effort I made my tongue say, "I want to be a Christian." Nobody laughed; it was still and solemn. I knew I had won my first great spiritual victory. I had believed that the line between the dead self and the new-born being was so sharp and definite that if I once passed it I should live in perpetual joy, and all struggle would henceforth be over. On the contrary, I do not think any great wave of joy or flood of bliss swept over me. I simply knew I had crossed a line. The more I saw what the goal was, the more I knew I had only made a beginning.

The next great battle came some days later, when I felt that I must get down before the whole meeting and pray. I cannot tell to this day whether I was afraid of the people or whether I was awed at the thought of addressing God. I only know that I got down and made my lips go, but not a word came. I seemed paralyzed at the immensity of the undertaking. Everybody saw me, but nobody heard me. In spite of times of swelling joy, when I knew that I had really passed a crisis in the incubation of a new life,

I still found that the old self was far from dead, and that I often slipped back into the ways I had left. The new land was in sight, and yet the cables which bound to the old shores were not entirely cut. But this much must be said that after that first memorable day in the schoolhouse I never had any doubt that God was for me, or any permanent sense that He would let go of me.

CHAPTER IX.

The New Life.

ALL through my boyhood I had thought of religion as a means of getting to heaven. The joy and relief which came to me in the moment of my surrender in the old schoolhouse, were saturated with the feeling of a certainty of heaven. I always had had a terror of death, not because I was afraid that my being would be ended by death, but much more because I was afraid of waking up after death in surroundings which would be extremely dreadful. I often tried without much success to picture the scenery and circumstances of my soul after it should "cross the river." One of my little playfellows, whose life had surely never set towards goodness, was suddenly stricken down. I saw him laid away in the unattractive little graveyard,

but I knew that this did not end his career. I wondered what was happening to him in his new place. How he must want to be alive again to get *different* before his case was eternally settled! But I knew *he* never could have another chance.

Now, however, I had the joy of feeling that my soul was saved, that if I died, as I had once come very near doing, I should be in blissful happiness for ever. It is impossible for anyone who has not had this experience to realise in any degree what it means. There are few moments in one's life which give any joy to compare with it. To be suddenly assured in your own soul that heaven—all you have ever imagined or dreamed of peace and joy—is to be yours, that the celestial gate will open at your knock when you come to it—this is certainly a supreme experience, and I had the thrill of it.

Men and women who are absorbed in the strenuous work and rush of this busy and material world hardly ever fully realise how seriously children think of heaven, how real a place it is to them. Unseen things are just as real to them as seen things are. The

extreme conscientiousness with which some boys and girls are affected—even to a morbid degree—often grows out of their magnified sense of the reality of heaven and hell, and the effect of this upon their fears and hopes. And the deeper this sense of the unseen the higher will be the joy and peace which sweep over the soul when it attains an assurance of salvation. This at least is borne out in my boyish experience.

But I soon found, what also I had probably all along dimly and vaguely known, that religion is concerned with something more than getting to heaven. It was this "something more" which made my new experience not altogether a joyous one. In some degree I realised now that I must be every day and in every place, and under all sorts and conditions of life, a new kind of person. I began to see that there was no immediate prospect of going to heaven, but instead of that, an unescapeable requirement upon me to be *good* here in the complex surroundings of this present world. I now began to be haunted by the idea that I could never really like myself, i.e., be satisfied, until I was every bit good, while

all the time this attainment seemed an almost hopeless quest. The result was that I had, in this period, moments of wonderful happiness, when I thought of the future life, and imagined myself an inhabitant of the heavenly city, followed by other times of depression, when I saw myself as I really was—far from heavenly in nature, and as unangelic as boys usually are. I kept up a vague hope, which I sometimes put into a prayer, that by some miraculous event I might be *made* good, and so have the struggle done with; that, in a word, I might anticipate heaven and find out here what it was like to be every whit good, and do now the kind of things I should do when I got to be truly an angel.

I think one of my uncles helped me realise more than anybody else, not by what he said, but by what he did, that this goodness of character which I was after is not something miraculous that drops into a soul out of the skies, but is rather something which is formed within as one faithfully does his set tasks, and goes to work with an enthusiastic passion to help make other people good. I saw him growing white and bent over with the

advance of years, but no touch of age in the slightest degree weakened his efforts to make our neighbourhood better. He preached the Gospel on the first day of the week, and the next day worked at a scheme for building up a town library. One day he was trying to do something to destroy the saloon and advance the cause of temperance, and the next day he would be raising money to endow an educational institution. Now he would be busy organising a local missionary society, and the next day he might be advocating a better system of taxation for the town. If he drove by he might be on his way to the station to start off for an extended religious visit, or he might be going down the road to visit a sick neighbour.

In all my uncle's work for the betterment of man at home and abroad, I never saw him discouraged or in doubt about the final issue. He was always full of hope and courage, and radiantly happy to be able to work at human problems. But the thing which impressed me most, as a thoughtful boy, was that in all this perplexing and wearying work, he was becoming more and more like my ideal

of a saint. His face was sunny; his smile was always ready to break out. We were all happier when he came, and he himself seemed to have a kind of inward peace which was very much like what I supposed the heavenly beings had. It had been his preaching which had so influenced my very early life, but it was much more his victorious life, which spoke with an unanswerable power like that of a sunset or the starry sky, that influenced me now in this critical time. I felt that the way to become good was to go to work in the power of God to help make others good and to help solve the problems of those among whom I lived.

I got a further impression of this truth from an event which came at first as a calamity. I went out one morning in early winter to feed our cattle and horses in the barn, and found to my horror that a fearful storm in the night had blown the barn down with almost everything we possessed in it. It was such a wreck as I had never seen. I can remember now the way I felt as I ran through the neighbourhood to call the men together to see if we could save anything. The news went fast,

and before the day was over men from far and near gathered in our yard. They were all hard working people like ourselves, with little wealth beyond their own strong hands. But before they separated they had decided to go to work at once and replace what the storm had destroyed. The entire neighbourhood went to work, and the new structure rose where the ruin had been.

It was a simple deed, which perhaps many towns could parallel, but it affected me in a strange way. I saw, as I had not before, that these men's religion was not an affair of the meeting-house ; it was not merely a way to get to heaven. It was something which made them thoughtful of others, and ready to sacrifice for others. I saw how it worked itself out into practical deeds of kindness and righteousness.

During those days that I worked in the cold of a Maine winter, among those men with their rough clothes and hard hands, I was helping build more than a barn ; I was forming a wider view of the religion which such men as these were living by.

CHAPTER X.

A Great Mystery.

A BOY has many sorrows to bear. It is very much to be questioned whether there is any other decade in the ordinary person's life which has so many periods of grief and sadness as the one which covers that marvellous epoch from five to fifteen. This is, of course, not the generally accepted view of a boy's life. The *average* is not dark, but bright, and yet the pain spots are very numerous. The fifteen-year-old boy in the country has tasted almost every kind of hard experience. He can give the moral philosopher, who is in search of wisdom, points on the real balance between pain and happiness. No matter how true and watchful his household may be in their relations to him, he still has many melancholy times, when he feels alone in the universe

with his own inward battles to fight, which drive him apart from men and make his world seem as solitary as Adam's before his companion appeared. He does not in the remotest degree understand himself as soon as he is out of the noisy crowd, where he has been playing and shouting as though he had no more burdens or problems than the unweaned lamb.

My associations during this trying period of inward perplexity and mystery were almost entirely with companions who were irreligious, who used all the forms of profanity and vulgarity known to the country youth. It apparently never had any serious influence upon me. I enjoyed their company, liked them, threw myself into their fun, and yet I never used their expressions, and as soon as I was alone again I was in my other world, where only God and myself knew of spiritual conflict.

It may be inferred that my above-stated belief that all boys have their lonely times and their hard periods is based only on my own experience, while the prevailing belief is that most boys are careless and akin to the

vegetable in their lack of serious concern. Those who hold that view do not know boys well. They will deceive the most watchful with their unconcern, but the moment they are alone and are no longer *acting* a part, they are another order of being. Catch the careless boy unawares and touch his quick with skilful finger, and you will always find that his tears flow with extreme ease.

There is one event which can never be repeated in this world, let it come when it will. It stands all alone, and it leaves a touch on one's entire self which all the passing years fail to remove. That is the death of a mother. This came to me while I was still in the stress of this outward-smooth, inward-rough period, so difficult to describe, so real in experience. I had often wondered whether I should go on living if mother should die, whether it would be possible to eat and drink, work and sleep, if she were gone. I thought about it because she was extremely frail and steadily grew more saintly-spiritual and less able for the work which she wanted to do. I had, however, endless faith that either the doctor would make her better or that some change would

come to make her strong again. It was a great comfort when the visiting ministers prayed for her—that the Lord would raise her up to strength. I felt sure it must be so. No other outcome was really thinkable; and I always ended by believing that we were to live on together just as we always had. A boy's judgment is invariably coloured by his wishes.

But on one memorable day all my hopes were shattered. The stroke fell. I had to face the reality. I stood confronted with that most stubborn, inexorable fact. It seemed impossible, and yet there it was. It ought not to be and yet nothing could change it. I thought of all the cases I had ever read or heard of, in which persons had been mistaken in calling some one dead. I clung like a drowning man to the vague hope that it might be a prolonged sleep, and that she would awaken and surprise us all. I strangely felt myself in the great company of sufferers all over the world, as though we belonged in one common fellowship. I saw a boy with whom I had often quarrelled go by the house. I thought only of the bare fact that he had lost his mother,

and so was in my group, and I burst into tears as I watched him.

Then followed my great rebellion—the worst I have ever known. Could a God be good who took away my mother? Could there be any heart of Love in a universe where such things happened? I had never had the slightest doubt of an immortal life after this one. I had taken it as though it were as much a settled fact as that the sun which went down in the West at night would come up in the East next morning.

Now I felt the ground going out from under this entire faith. My whole structure seemed toppling over. My prayers sounded hollow, and the kindly words of comfort spoken to me were empty words. It seemed at first as though this state of things would last for ever. I saw no way out of it. I had come upon a mental condition as new as it was to the first man who ever faced death. Every rope in my ship was tested. The question was being settled, however little I knew it, whether I was to go to wreck or come through the storm with a stauncher faith than I had ever known before.

The issue was determined not by any one thing, not by any one sharply-defined experience, but rather by the trend of my entire previous life. My religion had been forming from babyhood up. It was as much a part of me as the colour of my eyes, or my sense of space and time. I could not remember a time when I had not loved God and felt sure of His love. I had had my stages of development and of inward contest, but I had been perfectly sure of God all the time. Now my faith was suffering eclipse because I could not square this terrible event with my idea of a God of love. But little by little the memories of fifteen years came over this dark event with their trail of light. God had given me my mother, and through her I had learned of Him. There were hundreds of bright points in our lives together when her love and patience had helped me rise to my consciousness of God. I could not forget how I had heard her in her prayers talk with Him quietly about me as though she knew Him perfectly, and wanted to make me acquainted with Him. I knew, too, that she fully expected to go on living with Him after death should come to her. It apparently never

occurred to her that death would do more than separate her from us. My trouble had largely come because I could not get my thoughts above the earth over her coffin. She seemed there to me, and if she *was* there, then God was not good. But as her faith in a new and larger life came over me and quickened my own, and as I settled back on all the sure evidences that all my life had been in the love of God, I began to realise that I had not lost my mother, that she was nearer to God than ever, and that I was more than ever bound to live her kind of life. But I came out of this struggle no longer a child. I had wrestled with an angel in the dark, and when I emerged with the blessing, I had passed a crisis.

With this event came also the uprooting of my life from its old environment. I passed from the education which home and the free country life had to give to the more exact discipline and training of an old, well-established institution, which marked so completely the beginning of a new life that my boyhood story naturally ends here. I had never been beyond the horizon line, which I could see from the hill-top in our field. Now I discovered a world

as new to me as was the one which broke upon Columbus's sight as the *Pinta* touched San Salvador. But the events and experiences of this later period belong too intimately to me to be told. One's childhood is so distant that as one looks back on it, it seems in a sense to belong to somebody else, and its story can be told as if it were merely a narrative of a person whose life has come to an end. Even though the word "I" is used, it is the "I" that one remembers, rather than *knows*.

Here I have given some backward glimpses upon my religious life as it slowly formed. It probably seems more sombre than it really was. It has been necessary to touch the deeper moments to catch the crucial experiences. It may give the impression that I was not the ordinary, rollicking, healthy boy, but a child who lived apart and dwelt excessively on what was going on within. This would be a totally wrong impression, and would spoil my story. I was never thought of by the neighbours as a "good boy." They saw in me the incarnation of the country boy—reckless, stormy, fun-loving, a natural product of the lake and the woods, as free as a bird, and as

devoid of conscience-pricks as an animal. "What *will* he make?" was the frequent query. I have told my inner side because I believe it is not extraordinary, but a somewhat common experience. Boys are much deeper, much better than even their *mothers* know, and down below what they show and what they say is a centre of life which never is wholly silent. If their friends knew how to reach it there would be more good men in the world than there are.

HEADLEY BROTHERS, PRINTERS, LONDON; AND ASHFORD, KENT.

Jones, Rufus Matthew, 1863-1948.
A boy's religion from memory. Lo
Headley, 1903.
96p. 18cm.

1. Jones, Rufus Matthew, 1863-194
I. Title.